CLAIMS

Having thus described my invention, what I claim as new and desire to secure by Letters Patent is as follows:

1. A method for conducting electronic commerce, comprising:

browsing, by a user, for an item over an electronic medium;

recognizing that the user is lost in attempting to find said item; and

interactively querying, at any time during a session, said user whether the user needs help in finding said item.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

logging into a computer system by the user.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein said browsing comprising navigating to a hierarchy of categories.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein said recognizing includes detecting by an e-Store assistant that the user is lost, said querying being performed by said e-Store assistant.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein said recognizing includes said user recognizing that the user is lost and said user requesting help from an e-Store assistant.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein said e-Store assistant is implemented in software as one of a program and a search window which is activated based on one of a query and activated automatically after a predetermined number of navigations by said user.

7. The method of claim 5, wherein said e-Store assistant comprises a software dialer which dials up a telephone number of a customer support center.

8. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

considering the history of the browser based on a query that said user has typed in;

determining whether the user is lost; and

routing said user to a help resource to help the user.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein said help resource comprises one of a live person and a chat program.

10. A method of conducting electronic commerce, comprising:

electronically browsing, by a user, an electronic store, said store automatically registering the user with an electronic store assistant;

navigating, by the user, the electronic store;

tracking the user's inputs including any of requests, queries, and clicks made by the user;

determining whether the user seems lost based on the tracking of the user's inputs; and

launching, by the electronic store assistant, a help resource for asking the user whether the assistant can be of some help for the user.

11. The method of claim 10, further comprising:

determining whether the user has turned off the electronic store assistant; and

if it is determined that the electronic store assistant has been turned off, then allowing the user to shop without any external input.

12. The method according to claim 10, further comprising:

turning off, by the user, the electronic store assistant.

13. The method according to claim 10, further comprising:

refusing, by the user, to participate in an operation by the help resource.

14. The method according to claim 10, further comprising:

deciding shopping aisle categories as a priority by the electronic store as to what kind of items go into each category and sub-category; and

detecting an occurrence of when the user travels to a wrong category and types in a word or a phrase of an item that belongs to a different category, and pointing the user to a right category in which the user can find the item.

15. The method according to claim 10, further comprising:

proactively asking, by the user, for help.

16. The method according to claim 10, further comprising:

recognizing by the electronic store that the user is lost and automatically generating a query window asking the user if the user desires some help.

17. The method according to claim 10, further comprising:

if the user does not have an exact description of the product, then accumulating, by the electronic store, search requests and checking the search requests against the abstract describing each of a plurality of aisles of the electronic store and automatically directing the user to at least one aisle where the item may be found.

18. The method according to claim 10, further comprising:

if the user is determined to be searching for an item by traversing from category to category or category to subcategory without selecting any item, then determining that the user is browsing the aisles related to a predetermined item, but has not specified any particular requirement; and

directing the user to a live help facility located in the electronic store, wherein said live help facility sets up a chat session with the user.

19. The method according to claim 10, further comprising:

monitoring, by the electronic store assistant, the mouse clicks or queries typed in by the user to judge if a user is lost, and, if so, automatically being launched to help the user.

20. The method according to claim 10, further comprising:

tracking the user's navigational behaviors and previous-visit histories and storing the

histories in a personalized database.

21. The method according to claim 10, further comprising:

judging that the user is lost based on a predetermined number of queries and mouse clicks being performed without an item being selected.

22. The method according to claim 10, further comprising:

judging that the user is lost when the user repeatedly types in new search words on search windows; and

keeping track of the search queries made by the user such that if the number of searches tried by the user exceeds a predetermined threshold, then automatically activating an e-Store assistant.

23. A method of providing help in an electronic commerce transaction, comprising:

browsing an electronic store by a user for an item by navigating to a hierarchy of categories;

based on said navigating, judging whether a user is lost in attempting to find said item; and

based on said judging, interacting with said user to provide help to said user in finding the item sought.

24. The method according to claim 23, further comprising:

tracking keystrokes and mouse clicks of said user during said navigating and storing said

tracking in a personalized database for said user.

25. The method of claim 23, wherein said interacting is performed, at any time during an electronic commerce session, between the user and an electronic store assistant for providing said help.

26. A system for performing electronic commerce, comprising:

means for browsing, by a user, for an item over an electronic medium;

means for recognizing that the user is lost in attempting to find said item; and

means for interactively querying, at any time during a session, said user whether the user needs help in finding said item.

27. A signal-bearing medium tangibly embodying a program of machine-readable instructions executable by a digital processing apparatus to perform a method of conducting electronic commerce, said method comprising:

browsing, by a user, for an item over an electronic medium;

recognizing that the user is lost in attempting to find said item; and

interactively querying, at any time during a session, said user whether the user needs help in finding said item.